

RIGHT×LIGHT Volume One Prologue

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Right x Light Vol01 Prologue

Move, move, move——!

I thrashed around as hard as I could, trying to fight off the huge waves that threatened to drown me in its black depths.

I was pleading for fresh air and dearly hoping to see the sky once again with my very own eyes.

The cold seawater made my clothes heavy, stealing my only warmth. The waves that approached threatened to block my airway, sending the salty scent of the sea straight into my nose.

“Help, help me!”

Desperately, I yelled for help. My voice echoed off the water, making it sound unusually unlike me.

My voice didn’t travel far and no one heard me anyway.

I knew that all along, but I can’t do anything apart from yelling for help now. Even if I continued to thrash around, it would only just delay my certain death a little. Therefore, I decided to yell for help and hope for some miracle.

Clink!

Suddenly, something fell into the water. It could be seen above and below water, proving its existence.

I didn’t have the energy to find out what it was. Subconsciously, I got near it.

“Cough! Cough!”

I grabbed it with two hands, hugged it and took a couple of deep breaths. It seemed to be a plastic board, probably wreckage from the ship that I thought would never sink.

Even at that moment, there was nothing I could do so I glanced around. Similar pieces of wreckage were floating on the dark sea beside me. No one was in sight.

No one in sight?

The reality before my eyes, reminded me of my forgotten memories——things I should have never forgotten. Where were mom and dad? And...

“Yui!”

I shouted out with my hoarse voice, yelling for my younger sister who was beside me not long ago.

As I fell into the water, I clearly remember pulling her down with my right hand as well.

Did...I let go? Did I leave Yui all alone? Just because I didn't want to fall into the pitch-black depths I——

My body began to shake and my eyes slowly flickered to my trembling right hand. I was no longer holding the hand of my sister but clutching onto a plastic board.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAH——!”

The scream of harsh reality escaped my throat, like I had finally surrendered to the murky waters.

Sway!

I certainly didn't have time to feel sorry for myself.

The plastic board I had been clutching onto, suddenly began to rock furiously. I held it even tighter. Though I felt like a seriously mean person, I just didn't want to die yet.

Thud!

The board rocked again.

I was shocked to find someone else's hand on the board.

“Yui!”

I thought it was rather unlikely, but I still yelled her name. After a while, a man with long hair surfaced, not my sister.

“Cough! Cough!”

I didn't know whether he had nearly been drowned or not, but he gave a couple of good measured coughs. Unfortunately, our combined weights were too heavy for the board and it was slowly sinking.

“Um...um...”

I was thinking 'if we continue to be like this, we'll both sink', when he turned to me before I could say it. His eyes were an icy blue and I was surprised to see him glaring at me viciously.

“You're a hindrance! Brat!”

Whack!

I simply had no idea what just happened. I had already fallen back into the water when I finally realized that the man had just punched me for no reason.

Although I wanted to grab the board that was slowly floating away, I just couldn't quite reach it.

Glub.

Water entered my mouth and steadily carried me away. I knew that I had to act fast, but my body just wouldn't react to my commands.

My body was sinking, and my eyes could only see the water's surface, which was glowing slightly. I was sure that the place I was about to sink into was a much, much darker place than here.

I was going to sink anyway, so giving up seemed the most relaxing solution but I couldn't help raise my right arm for one last time. The hand that had let go of Yui could never change anything, never grab onto some miracle.

A bubble of air escaped from my mouth, rising up through the water.

I stared at the bubble. An illusion maybe, as the bubble that disappeared at the surface seemed to glow. I was sinking and should be far from the surface of the sea, but that light seemed to get closer.

That light then arrived before my eyes.

A gentle feeling enveloped around my right hand, it was the warmth of human skin. My hands tightened around it.

Yui must be here to save me, but the hand was slightly bigger than Yui's.

I saw a dazzling smile, a figure with a golden aura.

Not Yui? Then who is she? Another...woman?

She pulled me out, gradually leaving the gloomy depths behind.

My vision was blurred and I felt hazy. I was scared of losing the warmth in my right hand and I clutched her hand tightly. And then I blacked out, losing consciousness entirely.

RIGHT×LIGHT Volume One Chapter One

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1.

Rustle, rustle.

Hush, hush.

It was like that sea.

My body was rocking, but I didn't know why.

These were probably the very same waves from that time. Those waves that had once threatened to pull me into its shadowy depths.

Don't let go, I must not let go.

I tightened my right hand into a fist, only to realise nothing was in my hand. I also heard someone calling my name.

"Hey! Time to get up, Toomi-kun."

Thinking of the person who was no longer holding my hand made me abruptly look up.

"Kyaa!"

Seeing someone towering over me had given me a shock and I unwittingly gave a shriek.

".....eh, Fuyugami...san?"

I

recognised my classmate and muttering darkly, I glanced around.

I was in Sanyou Academy, in my class 2-2. No sea in the horizon either.

Just a dream? Looks like I had a little nap on my desk. Come to think of it, I don't recall anything about the last part of the lesson.

"Geez, you really gave me a shock back there. Morning Toomi-kun, though it's already lunchtime now."

She was smiling—though she didn't sound very happy. Her name was Fuyugami Yukie. She had long, straight hair and some stunning looks. But we've only been in the same class for two weeks and we shouldn't have talked to each other yet.

"S-s-sorry. Um, is there anything you need?"

To be honest, I felt rather confused. I just didn't understand why Fuyugami wanted to talk to me.

Apart from Fuyugami's manners, she had top grades, was popular and one could say she was our class idol. Compared to me, who has always been ignored, we were like people from two different worlds. It's always easier to look into the light from the darkness than the alternative and I had always believed that Fuyugami didn't even want to learn my name.

"Anyway, you free after school?"

"Eh? Well...I'm not that busy."

My train of thought was completely messed up. What sort of situation was I in? I began to think of all the nasty possibilities while having a sweet plastic smile fixed on my face.

"Oh, really?"

Fuyugami clasped her hands at her chest, face breaking into a radiant smile. For some reason, her reaction was enough to make me shiver, I had a bad feeling about this.

"Everyone——Toomi-kun says he's free today!"

Fuyugami turned her back on him and announced to the entire class. Then people started murmuring things like "that's good to hear", "I'm looking forward to this" etc. I had no clue what was happening, so I simply stared, puzzled at Fuyugami.

"...What's going on?"

I carefully chose my words and Fuyugami turned around to answer my question.

"Oh that, well you'll see. Toomi-kun's——magic."

Despite the huge smile on her face, I was speechless, not knowing anything appropriate to say.

"Hey! Yamazaki, Miyajima!"

I called out to the two boys who had been listening, in the corner of the room, the moment Fuyugami had left.

"Whatever, whatever. Calm down, Toomi."

The person who just spoke was Yamazaki. On Yamazaki's nose sat a pair of thick glasses and he certainly looked like a smart guy. In reality, however, he probably had no brains at all.

"Yeah, Fuyugami talked to you. You ought to be pleased."

That was Miyajima, a witty, striking but somewhat fat guy.

"How could I calm down? You guys must've told everyone about my boring magician hobbies and so now I have to perform in front of the whole class!"

Yamazaki's face looked a little guilty at this.

"It's not like that, how should I put it... it's a long story. Anyway, one day we talked to Fuyugami and somehow we started talking about you. We don't know why this happened though....."

I had finally managed to understand something. Yamazaki and Miyajima were my friends from primary school.....no, I should say my 'bad company'. They had finally managed to talk to Fuyugami and if they couldn't find something interesting to talk about, they wouldn't be able to become her friend.

"In other words, you guys used me like a prop. You guys realise I don't approve of this at all?"

"Sorry, it's just that the situation changed too quickly.....so talking about you helped us a lot."

Yamazaki was pleading me, but he didn't look very sorry at all. I suspected they had planned this conversation from the very start.

"Please, just turn up Toomi and leave the rest to us."

Miyajima had his hands clasped together. He was famous for convincing others and he was the complete opposite of me – he loved attention. But ever since becoming a second year, he hadn't had a chance to prove himself and was probably feeling rather frustrated.

"But....."

Yamazaki could see that I didn't want to answer, so he leaned forward, whispering.

"Don't be like that, it's not like you'll lose anything. It's actually a great opportunity to get closer to Fuyugami and the people around her! Isn't it about time you find a girlfriend? You don't look bad, you just need the chance to show yourself off and there'll definitely be people who want to know you more. Anyway, it's a great chance! Chance!"

"The people around her, huh?"

I chuckled at Yamazaki, who had been trying really hard to convince me for the last couple of minutes.

Fuyugami was at the very centre of the female students. The people around her, was actually the majority of the female students in our class, possibly our entire school too——

"So, it's all okay?"

I sighed.

"——Can't do anything about it anyway.....I understand alright."

"Awesome, that's the Toomi I know!"

This wasn't the first time this had happened. I had yet to refuse any of their requests. I bet these two wouldn't ever imagine me declining them.

The end result had always been the same, though this time, I could probably integrate into a popular group and never be bullied again.

I didn't want to miss the opportunity, even if it seemed very boring to me.

I knew what it was like to have enemies and I knew how weak I was.

After class, after the cleaning had been done, it was broadcasted all over the school. I had no idea who did it, though it was probably Fuyugami. I was suddenly in the centre of attention.

"Hey Toomi-kun, what are you planning to show us?"

Asked a girl I didn't even recognise.

"Hey! I heard you could do something awesome?"

That was a guy who had never been in my class until this year.

("Yamazaki! What on earth did you tell them?")

I had lowered my voice to ask him, who was standing beside me.

("That um.....I just boasted a little. But it's more interesting like that anyway.")

Yamazaki's words made my heart sink, how was I supposed to face these eager crowds?

“Well, I’m not sure what Yamazaki told you guys, but what I’m going to perform is a very boring magic trick. So boring I could never imagine performing in front of someone else. If you’re looking for something entertaining from me, you’ll be disappointed.”

Several people looked a little upset at my flat out confession, only Fuyugami, who was facing me, her face hadn’t changed. She simply said:

“Doesn’t matter, I’m looking forward to it anyway!”

A smile was fixed on her face and she spoke in a soft voice. People instantly started saying “that’s right, hurry up and show us!” and the like. Fuyugami really was the class idol.

It was exactly how Yamazaki and Miyajima had told me, Fuyugami was extremely influential. Something about her felt nice and for some reason, I felt a little warm inside.

But the more I looked at her, the more I realised her smile did not reach her eyes. She was thinking about something else.

At that moment, I thought of that man’s azure eyes.

I quickly pushed that thought away... I didn’t want to remember that.

“.....I understand. Then I shall begin.”

All eyes were on me now. It seemed that I didn’t really want Yamazaki and Miyajima to talk to Fuyugami anymore. The sweet sensation of being treated well was only going to last for a while anyway.

Finish soon and go home.

I took ten yen coin out of my wallet and put it in my right hand.

“This coin will disappear and I’m going to prove it to everyone.”

After my lame declaration, I lightly touched the coin. I could feel everyone gazing at my right hand and my hand felt a little sweaty. Then, I squeezed it tightly.

——I squeezed the coin.

Logically speaking, squeezing a coin so tightly should result in a sore palm. But to me, my hand didn’t hurt at all, only my chest did. I felt uncomfortable and I felt like vomiting.

It was about to happen again.

That coin was about to disappear, never to be seen again.

.....

When I had recovered, I slowly opened my clenched hand.

As expected, that coin was gone.

I sighed, not because I was tired——just a little disappointed.

“See, it’s not anything special right?”

I smiled sweetly, indicating that the show had just finished. This wasn’t anything special at all, in fact, it was so cheesy that even amateur magicians would scoff at. But my audience’s reaction totally surprised me.

“That’s amazing! How’d you do that?”

"I was carefully watching you the entire time, but I didn't see any flaws....."

"It must be like that! You used your fingers to grip....."

Everyone was chatting away. I was about to say "that's all for today" when they all chorused "do it again!" at me. I hadn't thought it was that popular.

Why? When I had first shown it to Yamazaki, he was beside himself, roaring with laughter. Are magic tricks the latest trend? I didn't keep up with the latest things, so I didn't know.

"Hey, do it again though this time use the slightly bigger five hundred yen coin."

Fuyugami beamed at me.

"A five, five hundred yen coin?"

"Please, Toomi-kun."

Though Fuyugami was pleading me, she was still representing the entire class and it was more like a command than a request. I sighed again and took out a five hundred yen coin out of my wallet.

"Fine, this will be the last time."

Its size wasn't much of a problem, as long as I could cover it with my fingers, it was bound to disappear. The real problem.....was for tomorrow.

I followed the same steps, held on to it tightly, tightly and finally opened.....my right hand.

Nothing was there, absolutely nothing was there. Nothing was left on my right hand. That was my magic, allowing things to disappear.

Some gasps of astonishment.

"That's amazing.....it's like real magic!"

Suddenly, eager chattering followed. The classroom suddenly got very loud. Fuyugami, who was still opposite me, chose this opportunity to speak.

"——Toomi-kun, how did you do that? Tell me your secret!"

"Secret?It's nothing special."

Fuyugami looked at me closely, like she was searching for something.

"Wait! Don't tell me it's 'Ruuto'?"

Fuyugami leaned forward, speaking in a very serious tone.

"Ah..... what's that?"

"You don't know? It's the most popular site on the internet about magic! No, it's more like it helps you to have real magic."

I couldn't follow her words, so I scratched my head, showing her that I was very confused. They say that girls are superstitious..... I guess they're right.

"Ahem. I said from the start that this was just a normal magic trick. Besides, do you really think magic exists in this world?"

I had only just realised that what Fuyugami wanted wasn't magic tricks, but real magic.

Fuyugami however, smiled unexpectedly.

“Oh I see, but wouldn’t it be awesome if magic really did exist? Such a pity, Yamazaki-kun said that Toomi-kun’s magic tricks felt very real and I was really looking forward to it too.

As expected, Fuyugami turned away looking disappointed but instead, I felt a little uneasy.

That’s when I noticed that the other students around me looked disappointed too. Were they really that keen on magic? Magic tricks wasn’t popular, it was ‘Ruuto’ magic.

Sigh—I messed up again, geez.....

I was supposed to half-joke around that it was real magic, just to keep up their good mood.

At this age, they had all stopped believing in magic ages ago. They simply just wanted to see something similar, find something to laugh at and mentioning the fact that they were mere ‘magic tricks’ made the atmosphere very tense.

I had always been clumsy, never understanding the situation. If I had been a little more light-hearted earlier, I wouldn’t be in so much trouble.

Fortunately Miyajima, who had been silent until now, decided to say something.

“Well well, I’m next, I’m even better than Toomi! I’ll show you something amazing!”

Everyone’s gaze was on Miyajima. Some of the people who knew him stared incredulously while the majority, who didn’t know him at all, studied him eagerly.

I’m saved..... that’s right, Miyajima can handle situations like this very well, compared to me.

He had probably prepared a ventriloquism act or an impersonation show. Seeing that Fuyugami was no longer looking at me, I slowly backed away from the crowd.

I was done and it was time to go.

I had to get my bag, so I headed towards my own desk. That’s when I noticed a girl, who hadn’t joined in the fun, who was sitting in the corner by the window.

I didn’t say anything to her.

Turning around, I left the classroom.

After a couple of steps I heard a loud laugh from the classroom and I quickened my pace.

2.

Sanyou Academy was a private co-ed boarding school. After crossing the school’s huge field and leaving through the school gates, I walked beside the river at the front of my school.

The sakura trees were still in full blossom last week but now there were only green leaves left. After walking for about ten minutes, I saw an old four-storey building, which was apparently the first dormitory. There were four dormitories in total, two and four a little further up stream and the girls’ one on the other side. Their dormitory was a lot prettier and most of the boys thought it was rather unfair of the teachers.

I waved at the cleaner of my dorm before climbing up the huge flight of stairs, right up to the fourth level. Room One. I pushed open the door and collapsed onto my bed.

“Sigh.....”

Today was exhausting. I was very tired and I didn’t want to do anything. It was all because of those pointless performances that made me remember something I really wanted to forget.

“Damn it.”

I turned slightly, holding up my right hand to the ceiling.

I felt uneasy and nauseous. I knew the after effects, so why had I shown that to Yamazaki and them?

The answer was simple. At that time, I wanted to integrate. That's why I had tried to pretend to be a magician. Heh, I really overdid it this time.

"Magic, huh....."

Thinking of Fuyugami and my classmates, I began to laugh bitterly.

If it really did exist, where would that leave me?

—huh? That sort of stuff just doesn't exist. I made that five hundred yen coin disappear so therefore, I wouldn't be able to eat lunch tomorrow. There were no benefits from it apart from a hungry stomach.

That's right—that wasn't a normal magic trick. Even if you searched through my clothes thoroughly, you won't be able to find that coin. It was completely illogical but to me, it wasn't 'magic'. It was more like a 'curse'.

Destined to never hold on to anything—a curse.

That summer three years ago, I hadn't been able to hold on to my sister, hadn't been able to save her and now I had developed this awkward power.

Anything I have held onto tightly since then has disappeared immediately. The things I have held onto disappeared without a trace. In other words—it completely vanished. It's hard to explain. I used to think that I was crazy somehow, but no matter how many times I did it or in front of how many people, it always just.....happened.

Come to think of it, it has only worked with my right hand. I must be able to close my hand over it too so if I can still see it, it won't disappear.

In other words, I couldn't do anything with it apart from boring magic tricks.

After that, I have lost numerous coins and small objects. These days, I have pretended to be a left-hander and tried to use my right hand as less as possible. This way, I wouldn't lose so many things, but I still had to be on my guard at all times.

Three years ago, my sister and parents had died in that incident. I was adopted by some relatives but my cursed hand reminded me of Yui too much and so I begged them to let me go to a boarding school. Even if I hadn't a cursed hand, I would have done so anyway.

I continued to laugh bitterly while glaring at my right hand.

To be honest, I didn't have any idea what my hand was. I hadn't been able to think of any other reasonable explanation apart from 'curse' but I really hoped that someone would tell me the truth.

"Oh yeah, didn't Fuyugami say something?"

I tried to remember what Fuyugami had said. Something like..... Ruuto.

Pulling myself up, I fumbled for the laptop on the table. I wasn't sure what she said, but I wanted to check just in case.

Well somehow, managed to open a search engine. To my surprise, thousands of results came up. Fuyugami was right, it was almost like it really did exist. But!

"What..... this one."

Ruuto was a bit like a ceremony to turn into a magician but looking at the details, I could see that after the ceremony, one was supposed to take this strange medicine. I thought it was quite interesting and so I decided to search the site in depth. Looking at the guest book, I saw several detailed prescriptions. I also saw several comments from people who claimed they had witnessed what happened after drinking the medicine.

After studying those long lists, I suddenly felt very tired. These were all ridiculous.

“That one! After taking that medicine, of course you’d feel like you’re slowly gaining magical powers!”

I felt really surprised and unwittingly, I had begun to mock some of the comments I saw. Among the lists, there were several dangerous medications I had heard of but never seen and others I hadn’t even heard of, probably illegal drugs under a different name.

Either way, I didn’t want to drink, eat or take any of the medicines. The magic they were talking about was probably just hallucinations anyway. There were several comments that said ‘I can use magic now’ but they were definitely a bunch of lies. This site was popular, but its content was just ridiculous.

This heck of a site is popular these days, huh, just what’s wrong with the rest of the world?

I stared at——my right hand.

I didn’t completely disbelieve in magic, because there really are some illogical happenings in the world. Believing in “Ruuto”, however, was a completely different story.

“Magic users.”

Saying this phrase made me think of the sea and that girl with a golden aura. She had pulled me up from the sea’s depths and to me, she was extraordinary.

Of course no one believed me. They always said I was seeing illusions but I believe me being alive, proves that she exists. Maybe she is a real magic user. I suddenly felt a little awkward.

Slam.

I closed my laptop and collapsed on my bed again.

I began to feel drowsy and I couldn’t fight off the urge to go to sleep this time. Though I felt as if I had forgotten something important, I still closed my eyes and very soon, I fell asleep.

3.

I heard someone laugh. It was very far away, faint but definitely someone laughing.

I sat at my desk in the corner of the room, half-listening to my classmates’ conversations.

We were in the same classroom. Technically I was very close to the person who was laughing, but I was facing the window and to me it sounded——very far away.

What am I doing? Why am I all alone?

Aren’t I a bit like…… that girl who always stays in the corner of the room?

I didn’t want to be like that, so I turned to face the classroom.

“——eh?”

I recognised my classroom, but it wasn’t the place I went to everyday. Why……

The bell rang before I came back to my senses. Everyone quietened down and stared curiously at me. I couldn’t see Yamazaki or Miyajima among the crowd because this was apparently my

class from junior high.

A dream——

I had only just decided this when someone beside me opened her mouth to speak.

“You left me.”

Gulp.

My heart sped up, I couldn't breathe and my body felt stiff.

Though her voice was soft, there was a trace of——hatred. Her voice was icily familiar——

My sister's.....voice.

“Let go of me.”

The other students began to speak in my sister's voice.

“You chose yourself over me.”

“You made me sink.”

“You killed me.”

“You betrayed me.”

My sister——Yui's voice echoed in the classroom.

Stop, stop, please stop. Damn it!!

I couldn't help but block my ears and shut my eyes tight.

Strange, this was very strange. I should have already left here! Why? Why am I here? That's right, it's a dream! I forgot, I totally forgot that opening my eyes will make the dream end. It will end.

“Then, I'll open my eyes.”

I slowly took my right hand off my ear.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

I slowly opened my eyes behind my right hand.

“Um.....”

A girl was standing beside my desk. She was wearing a red dress, the same one back then..... my sister. The other students had all mysteriously disappeared.

“Yui.”

“What?”

Yui nodded, her ponytail bobbing up and down. Then, she reached for my right hand.

I hesitated, not knowing what to do and then Yui suddenly asked me a question.

“Are.....you not going to save me?”

I couldn't move at those words, only feeling Yui's hand touch mine.

Freezing. Just like the sea.

Yui tightly gripped on to my hand and I felt a chill run up my spine.

"Don't let go of me again, Onii-chan."

Yui looked very happy when she said this.

Ah! I know what I forgot before I fell asleep. Whenever I use my right hand, that night I would remember that incident and have an unstoppable nightmare.

I slowly lost the control of my body.

Ah, ah! It's that sea. I had to re-experience that agony again.

—Ow.

But my entire body felt numb, so why did I feel pain? I don't know.

4.

What must I do to make my sister forgive me? Just what am I supposed to do?

If I die, will we meet again in heaven? Or will I go to hell?

I kept on pondering over these useless details, despite realising that I would never—

Sigh~~

"....."

I took the river path, suddenly feeling very hungry.

Despite having that awful nightmare last night, I didn't feel very scared.....or was I just getting used to it?

I violently shook my head at the thought. I shouldn't get used to these dreams. My right hand still felt icy cold.

I couldn't help sighing again. Yesterday, I fell asleep, ended up missing dinner and even breakfast. So it wasn't unusual why my stomach was growling, urging for nutritional supplements.

"I only planned to take a short nap."

I sighed because I should've at least set my alarm clock. My tired body rocked dangerously while I walked. I was still wearing my uniform from yesterday, but I wasn't planning to go to school. There was no school today. I was only going outside for some fresh air, to wake myself up.

Guuuuuuuuuu.

My hungry stomach began to utter sad calls. I really wanted to stop sighing too, but I was more depressed over the thought of no lunch. I sighed again, even louder. My school's canteen only provides for breakfast and dinner, lunch is paid elsewhere by each student.

I had never been in this situation before. True, I was spending money recklessly for the last couple of months, but I had left enough lunch money. That five hundred yen coin was specifically left for lunch today..... come to think of it, I still have a few coins in my pocket.

"Geez, I don't get anything in exchange from this beast."

I stared at my right hand while I slowly walked over the bridge. In the opposite direction of the school, there was a JR station and it led to nearby shopping streets.

I should buy a volume of manga to pass the time. My favourite weekly magazine should be published today. With that thought in mind, I slowly walked in that direction and somehow I started to walk a little faster when I thought of yesterday's events.

As expected, there were massive crowds at the station. In this town, apart from Sanyou Academy, there were several other private primary, junior high, senior high schools and even a couple of universities. Therefore, there were quite a lot of young people in this region. According to the rumours, this town had been using its connections with the capital to develop into one of the most educated regions in Japan.

This town was pretty much in the countryside and it wasn't very posh. Most of the time people would only come here for business or travelling purposes. Because of the shopping centre built last year, no one has found living here too inconvenient because before it was built, you had to travel on a tram to some far away city to get what you wanted. Despite this, there was still always a huge crowd at the station.

To get to the fifth level where there was a huge bookstore, I had to squeeze through the crowd. This town was small so it wasn't unlikely that I'd see Yamazaki or Miyajima here.

Before leaving, I wanted to ask what happened yesterday, but both of them had probably gone out as no one answered the door. During the holidays, they usually went to bookstores, record stores or the arcade. They were too shy to talk to girls and they would only ever observe them from a distance. It wasn't deliberate, but their activities often overlapped mine and therefore, we often unexpectedly ran into each other.

"Sigh....."

The crowd was pushing so hard that I could barely breathe and unwittingly, I sighed.

Because of that incident that rendered me parentless, whenever I was in a crowd, I was always worried that no one would notice my existence.

Maybe I didn't belong in this world, maybe I only belong in my family's world. All these cranky thoughts made my heart hurt a little.

In the midst of the slowly moving crowd, the person in front of me suddenly stopped and I nearly bumped into that person.

"What, what's wrong?"

I had been thinking too hard, completely unaware of my surroundings and I had only just come back to my senses. I tried to look over the crowd to see what had happened.

Until just then, the crowd had been slowly moving but now, everyone seems to have stopped.

What...just happened?

The air felt very strange, like something very serious had happened. I gulped.

The bustling activity of the crowd had vanished, everyone had stopped speaking. It was like the sea on a very sunny day, very flat and calm. The strange however, was that everyone had tilted their head to look at the sky.

"?"

I followed their eyes. It was the sixth floor of the shopping centre I was heading to but I still didn't understand why everyone was looking at it until I saw it myself.

There was someone standing on the roof edge.

On the wrong side of the railing, there was a small figure, long golden blond hair caught by the wind. I had confidence in my eyesight – I knew I wasn't wrong – because though that person was a girl, even if she had her back turned on me.

Suicide?

That was my first thought, but if it really was like that, I thought it was rather strange. She was facing some mysterious looking people. It was too far, so I wasn't sure, but I thought that they were all wearing the same.....mask.

Whizz!

Suddenly, my right arm began to shake as if electricity had possessed it. What the hell? I was just about to look at my arm when I saw something I just couldn't tear my eyes off.

The girl had jumped.

She never hesitated.

“Ah!”

My first impulse was to run and catch her, but the people around me stood around like statues.

Although no one could help her anymore, I still impatiently yelled at the crowd.

“Hey hey, what are you guys doing?”

The crowd never budged when that girl fell but even now, they had no reaction to my voice either. A girl was rapidly falling to her death, down, down, down and just as I thought she'd crash into us, she floated instead.

“Eh?”

I could no longer believe my eyes. The girl hadn't fallen down rapidly and apparently, she had been slowly floating down toward us. The people around me were completely frozen and I saw that they were studying her appearance.

My own eyes never left her either. Very soon, she brushed past me. Her green eyes looked in my direction and I could have sworn that she met my eyes.

I continued to quietly observe her when a sudden gust of wind made me lost my balance. Another guy had also fallen down and he had covered his hands over his face. I carefully chose my words.

“Um, well.....you okay?”

“Oh.....oh uh!”

But he didn't answer my question. Although it was none of my business, I reached out a reassuring arm towards his shoulder but he pushed me away.

“Ow!”

I jumped back in shock. He was wearing an inorganic-looking mask, with two tiny slits for his eyes. He was staring at me.

I couldn't understand what was happening and the horrifying scene before me, made me want to run away. Fast. But then I heard a sound behind me and I turned to see what it was. I slowly turned around, only to see a tall woman wearing the same mask, peering at me.

“KYAAAA!”

I began to scream, wanting to leave. That was when I realised that everyone around me had the same white mask, peering at me through those little slits. There was nowhere I could run, they had me surrounded and I couldn't do anything. However, they didn't do anything to me. It was like they were controlled by something as they all began to slowly move in the same direction.

It was the same direction that girl flew towards. The crowd had begun to move before I even knew what was happening.

"Hey, wait!"

Feeling helpless, I was forced to go along with them. They had completely ignored all my protests and instead, they had directly sandwiched me in between them while they moved.

This time, I really had no clue what was happening around me. I could only fret over my little fantasies.

In order to escape the crowd, I began to study their habits. It was like I didn't exist and their eyes were fixed on a distant location. It was impossible to try walking in the opposite direction so I tried to walk diagonally, squeezing past each person.

"Ow!"

Someone elbowed my shoulder. They didn't care about hurting me at all, so I was getting all sorts of abuse. I don't know how long it took me to get out of the crowd, but somehow I managed it.

"Huff, huff....."

This place looked like some restaurant carpark. I lay down and heavily breathed. Every inch of my body was screaming with pain.

Since I can feel the pain, does this mean this.....isn't a dream?

I looked at the side, over there, the masked people continued to walk forward.

Anyway, they didn't intend to hurt me so the uncomfortable feeling began to lessen and I felt less scared too.

How did it turn out to be like this?

I knew that this had to do with that flying, golden-haired girl. I didn't know anything else though.

Whatever, I had to get away from this place. I don't ever want to encounter something so baffling again.

I pulled my sore body up, studying my surroundings once again. There was a major road in front of me, but it was occupied by the masked people and it was almost impossible to cross. On the other side however, over the carpark's wall, there was a small alley I could use to escape.

If I walk in the opposite direction of the masked crowd, theoretically I would never see them again.

That's what I thought before I rushed to get away.

I really wished I had eaten breakfast. I was forcing my nutrition-deprived body to run and I felt remorse wash over me.

It felt as if the world had just rejected my existence. The normal life I had tried so hard to hold onto was suddenly destroyed today.

If it really was like that, just blame me for trying to use my right hand to hold on to a normal lifestyle!

"Impossible! How could something so ridiculous happen?"

I shook my head, getting rid of my vivid imagination. I climbed over the not-so-high cement wall, jumping into the dark alley.

In the narrow alley, I tried to go in the opposite direction, away from the masked crowd, so I carefully studied the road same in the distance. Seeing that no one was there, I slowly walked towards it.

The masked people went in the same direction and the people who were originally there, were probably curious and headed in the same direction. It was a great opportunity to leave nonetheless. There was a school further down the road and though there was no school today, there was bound to be a couple of people loitering around there. I no longer cared about whether they'd believe my bizarre tale because at the moment, schools were all I could rely on.

I prepared myself, to run out of the alley and bravely run down the road. I prayed that I could get there safely.

Unfortunately, my prayer ended within a metre.

Before I had even gotten out of the alley, someone swooped towards me.

"Uhh!"

When you're sprinting, it's usually a bad idea to suddenly stop but that was what I did and I ended up tripping over.

"Kyaa!"

When I realised that it was that flying girl who made me trip over, I suddenly felt very shocked. She was beside me, her hair covering her eyes.

"Ow....."

I moaned while lifting my head.

Her face really surprised me. At first sight, I thought she was a foreigner, but her face was more Japanese.

"Sor, sorry....."

I instantly started to apologise when I suddenly felt a severe impact. The girl angrily yelled at me.

"Get off!"

Just how strong were her kicks? I flew into the air, my back hitting the ground with a sickening crack.

"Cough, cough cough!"

My

interior organs felt all shaken up and it was painful to breathe. I slowly got up, staring at her. I could only see her standing straight, her clothes were very fancy and she was patting the dust off her long dress. She had her back turned on me, but I could tell that she was muttering something unintelligible.

"Geez—I thought that I'd already diverted their attention, only to find out another one hiding in this awful place."

Her attitude was annoying. Sure, I did make her fall over, but she didn't need to kick me so hard either.

I felt a little angry.

“Hey, hey.....”

I had finally managed to say something. She however, jumped back in fright at my voice and slowly turned to look at me.

“What the hell! Eh? How can you speak? Come to think of it, you aren’t wearing a mask..... what, could you be a normal guy?”

She looked very surprised while she said this, but then she looked happy too.

“I am Japanese, therefore, I will always be able to speak Japanese. Also, I believe that I am a normal person—and you hadn’t even given me a chance to explain myself when you kicked me. Of course, that’s why at the moment, I feel angry like a ‘normal’ person.”

I tried to use sarcasm as much as possible, though she wasn’t listening to me at all. She was deep in thought about something else.

“Are you even listening?”

She laughed at my question.

“I never imagined that someone could be unaffected by ‘Magic Girl’s Predator Mask’. The reason? I don’t know, but something good will happen soon.....”

“Eh? What are you saying——”

I was planning to continue my little speech when I felt the ground rumble.

“What, what’s wrong?”

I looked around but I couldn’t find the source of the vibrations.

“Geez, dilly-dallying here was a waste of time after all, they’ve caught up.”

The girl beside me sighed and I suddenly remembered something. That crowd was after her, so if I stayed here, I would be.....

“Hey, hey, are those guys chasing after ya? Just what on earth is happening geez!”

I opened my mouth to ask her and I certainly wasn’t being very polite when I called her ‘ya’. It was probably because she kicked me too hard or something.

“That’s right—they’re after me. Everyone around here has become one of them. No matter how many I take down, they just keep coming because I’m their bloody target, which is pretty annoying by the way sigh.”

The way she spoke made me feel dumb and annoyed, not to mention the fact that she didn’t try to make any sense. I only knew one important thing, that is—I had to leave as soon as possible.

“Oh, you ought to run then. If you stay here, wouldn’t you get caught by them? If you stay here, wouldn’t I get hurt as well?”

I hurriedly tried to get away from her, not wanting to help her at all. She was the enemy of those masked people and I knew what having an enemy was like.

“That’s because I can’t escape anymore.”

She giggled.

“Why not? Why don’t you just do that..... float away thing?”

I didn’t usually like saying these nasty questions, but I still ended up saying them. The rumbling was getting stronger and I could tell that danger was rapidly approaching once again.

“Look at this.”

The girl raised her hands. Not understanding at all, I stared at her palms.

“Ah!”

I took a deep breath. Her hands were startlingly semi-transparent and I could see her face behind her palms. She laughed amusedly at my shocked expression.

“You scared? I’m alive, but I’m currently in hologram form, which is much like a half-ghost form. Magic ——well in other words, if I spend too much energy on that flying thing, I may lose my soul or my physical body. To be honest, I’m already losing control.....I never imagined I’d be in so much danger.”

She kept on opening and closing her translucent hands, face looking regretful while she spoke. I hadn’t realised until then that the rumbling sound was now coming in all directions.

“Eh——we’re surrounded?”

She said this in a soft voice, but I replied in a much louder, agitated voice than usual.

“Ah! That’s enough! I may not understand what you’re talking about, but, you can’t fly anymore right? By the way, you’re still standing here with a rather carefree-looking face on. If you can do anything else, please do it before you get me involved. Escape now!

Black silhouettes of people slowly appeared on the other end of the road. Looking back, I could see that the masked crowd had already cornered us and they were steadily closing in.

“Something else I can do? Well, there is something else I can do, though I only just remembered about it a while ago.”

The girl lifted her finger and pointed behind me.

“Eh?”

I glanced back, confused. There was nothing there, except for masked people closing in on us.

“No, not them. You. I. Meant. You.”

Unexpectedly, that’s what she said.

“I don’t understand.....what you mean.”

Something felt wrong and I couldn’t help taking a step away from her.

“I don’t know why, but ‘Magic Girl’s Predator Mask’ doesn’t seem to work on you. Heh, you can be my shield.”

“What, wait, what’s that?”

I took another step back but the masked people were already too close. There was nowhere to go.

“To recover, I really do need my physical body. Without my physical body, my hologram can’t repair itself. Therefore, please look after me for a while! Don’t worry, though I may be a burden, you will only be a little more tired than usual.”

What the hell was she talking about? I was now convinced that she was crazy, but unfortunately, she really was semi-transparent. If she really was something like a ghost, what did she want me to do? Look after her? Did she want to possess me?

I shuddered at the thought.

Hearing my growl, she unhappily raised an eyebrow.

“Geez——didn’t I tell you before? My physical body actually exists elsewhere. Of course, my physical body is hidden so those guys won’t get me that easily and if that time does come, I will naturally self-destruct. If my physical body still exists, I can still feel pain when I get hit and this can make me lose a lot of my energy. If my spirit form disappears, those masked guys will too. If I can’t maintain my physical body, I’ll die. Though, it currently seems that you’re going to die too.”

The road was completely blocked with masked people and she studied them, calculating distance. Their footsteps were thundering on the ground as they threateningly approached us.

“——You haven’t a choice, you’ve got to believe me.”

“I refuse.”

Despite everything, I still shook my head. My first thought was that if I interacted with her, I would lose my peaceful life again and even more strong, powerful enemies.

“Geez——I can’t believe you just rejected a desperate girl, useless guy.”

“I don’t remember you asking me for help. Aren’t you ordering me to do this or that?”

“Oh really? Listen to me. If you don’t want to die, do as I say.”

“You’re trying to intimidate me!”

Shock appeared on her face at this. Had she really been trying to ask me for help?

“——What, I’m just saying the truth. Don’t tell me, you really want to die?”

“That’s impossible!”

“Then how could this be? Ah, did you really think that you ‘weren’t their target and could probably escape’? How unfortunate. If you try to do that, I’ll hold on to you and run with you.”

“Hey.....”

She seemed very nervous. But.....her last words really stung. Did I really have to listen to her? I could see the masked people approaching behind her and I knew that there was not much time left now. My gaze fell on her foot, only to realise that she was shaking.

Eh? She’s shaking?

It was the first time I had ever seen a frightened girl. I realised how similar we were. To her, I was like that floating piece of wreckage that took me ages to hold onto.

——Damn it.

“Can we really.....change the situation?”

She sighed in relief.

“Of course!”

She replied very confidently. Me..... it was painful, but I still nodded back.

"I understand! Let's do as you say."

"Hmph, you should have listened to me from the very start. Well, the first thing is—— to escape.

For a moment, her face was one of happiness but then she was scowling again.

"Escape?"

"We have to get safe, possessing takes a bit of time. Though I plan to recover soon, I think it's a better idea to hide in you sooner than later and get rid of that magic first."

Magic? Was she talking about the masked people? I didn't understand much, but I was willing to do anything to get out of here. Though the idea of possessing seemed a little creepy, there wasn't time to dwell on it much further.

"But didn't you say that you couldn't fly anymore?"

"I should be able to do it again once or twice and it's not much of a problem if the distance is short. Hurry, hold on to me."

".....Where?"

Embarrassed, I stared at her.

"I'm, I'm going to fly, so you have to hold tightly onto my waist! If you don't, I'll be sure to kill you."

"——If you kill me, won't you get killed too?"

Though I was retorting back at that annoying girl, I still listened to her and slipped my hands around her waist. That was when I realised how much shorter she was and that I had to bend slightly to hold onto her.

"Then, let's go."

She closed her eyes in concentration, after she said this. During this time, the masked people had come even closer to us. I could even see masked people shuffling down the alley I came from. They were close, no, too close.

"Hey, hey, do something!"

I yelled, but she didn't react at all. They had already lifted their hands to grab us when she opened her eyes, shouting something.

"The great Eastern winds!"

"Kyaa!"

The girl suddenly jerked upwards. This wasn't the time to joke around as I had to bury my face into her back and I had to hold her even tighter. Though she claimed to be a half-ghost, she was really warm.

The air pressure was rather strong. Though it didn't hurt, I couldn't open my eyes at all. Not long after, the feeling of being pulled down by gravity was replaced with a floating sensation, though by then, it felt as if my internal organs were rapidly falling. I was gritting my teeth when I heard something above me.

"How long do you plan to hold onto me?"

Hearing that, I opened my eyes. Though I was still had the floating sensation, my feet were on the ground. She slapped my arms away from her. I was planning to complain, but I decided to shut up after seeing her hands even more transparent.

"Then, hurry and come here. It's going to start soon."

The girl stretched her almost-transparent hand towards me. She probably wanted me to take it or something.

"Oh, that's right."

I took her hand in mine unwilling, my face rather dubious.

"Well, never mind. My name's Alice Karana Sterling Wright. You?"

".....Toomi... Keisuke."

"I see. Well, Keisuke, try not to think about anything. Though you did agree to my plan a while ago, I do wonder if you secretly didn't want to and whether I will be a burden or not."

This girl..... Alice something, tightly closed her eyes again. Her left hand was suddenly very warm too, like some chemical reaction had occurred or something had been taken away from me. Was this possessing?

"Hey, I'd just like to say this first. I hate those who never help a desperate girl and those scaredy-cats who only care about themselves!"

Alice said this with her eyes still firmly shut.

"What a coincidence..... likewise, I hate people who don't care about what happens to others or their feelings."

I answered back sincerely when her palm suddenly got hotter and it was gradually beginning to hurt. I don't know if it was just me, but it felt as if my body had just become a lot heavier. Alice still seemed carefree enough. Apparently I was the only one in pain.

That was definitely on purpose.

As expected, everything went according to my predictions.

I knew that my peaceful life, the one I had worked so hard to get, was about to vanish. If this was all just a dream, I could very well be in heaven.

But, this was definitely the reality which I couldn't wake up from. Even if I wake up tomorrow, what happened today would definitely continue on.

As realisation of this harsh reality, I sighed deeply.

5.

We landed on the flat roof of a small shop. I carefully walked down the ancient stairs, using the rusty handrails for support. Occasionally I'd peer over the handrails. The streets were back to their usual, lively state. No one was wearing a white mask.

"See, I was right, weren't I?"

The almost-transparent Alice floated beside me. According to her, she really was inside me, but she was still able to talk to me. Only I could see, hear or touch her. No different to a ghost now, I supposed.

"Are we really okay? If we go out like this, will those white masked guys chase after us again?"

"Keisuke, you aren't like a guy at all. When I say it is fine, it's fine. Cheerfully walk out, yes, cheerfully!"

Though I really wanted to yell at this Alice-girl for calling me by my first name without permission, I still bit back the nasty comment circulating in my thoughts.

After all, Alice did say that if her spirit form disappears, so will those masked people.....

“——”

I tried hard not to look around me anxiously, but no one seemed to attack us anyway.

“Come to think of it, why aren't these people perplexed by what happened?”

I asked Alice, who was clutching on to my shoulder. Theoretically, after seeing Alice and turning into one of those masked people, when they came back to their senses, they should be feeling rather confused about why they were in a completely different place than before.

“My guess is that they forgot about what happened during their masked moments. Besides, I'm pretty sure the enemy did make sure their memories would be continuous. That's why they're walking around, like nothing ever happened!”

“That's convenient..... never mind, I don't want to know that much anyway. I don't want anything to do with this anymore. When we leave this place, you might as well get out of me as soon as possible!”

I was already exhausted by the time I finished, though Alice's face was one of surprise.

“Eh, why? I don't plan to get out of Keisuke any time soon.”

“What? Why not? After we get out of this place, you won't need me anymore.”

I, the person who had only planned to help her for a while, hurriedly said.

“There's still a dozen other reasons I need to use your body. Besides, didn't you listen to me? Those masked guys are after me and when I leave you, they'll certainly come after me again.”

“.....If it's like that, though it's a little inconvenient, I'll just take you to a mountain, where no one is there. You don't have any problems with that do you?”

“Of course I do. Why would I give up such a perfect host? Keisuke, you must find my enemy on my behalf. I'm sure he's in this town. I will leave you when you beat that guy and find my body.”

“Your body?”

“I mean my physical body. I really underestimated the guy in this town and ended up getting cornered. I'm still connected with my physical body, but not much..... I'm sure they're using my body to track me. So, I'm counting on you!”

The absurdity of her words left me speechless but when I came back to my senses, I was really annoyed.

“What, don't tell me I'm really expected to help you with this sort of thing.....”

I almost shrieked when I said this but I saw the curious stares around us and I had to keep my voice down.

“Hahaha, be careful. Only you can see and hear me, Keisuke. Others are going to think you're crazy.”

“Shut, shut up! No matter what, I——!”

I was seething with anger but Alice was still doubling over in laughter.

“Ha. Eh..... I'm tired——I'm going to have a nap.”

“Eh, what.....hey?”

After that, Alice really turned transparent and even I couldn't see her anymore. I stood there, in the middle of the footpath with a dazed look on my face.

"Don't tell me she disappeared for good..... no way?"

Though the tone of my words was hopeful, I didn't actually feel that way.

Guuu.....

My stomach began to grumble again. I had forgotten all about food and now I was starving in every way possible. My footsteps were laboured, each heavier than the last.

How should I describe her! That Alice did once say that it would only be a little heavier.

"What little..... this isn't just a little! It's much heavier than usual."

I tried not to lose my consciousness.

I no longer had the energy to do anything, apart from trudging back to my dormitory in pain.

☆

"Damn you."

In the midst of disturbingly large crowd, a tall man cursed under his breath. Though it was already spring, he was still wearing a long black coat and black sunglasses. His hair was jet black and to others, he was a bit like a living shadow. Behind those glasses, his eyes were his blue eyes but with a black light in them.

"The spell was broken! Disappeared huh..... that can't be right, that's just way too fast. We drove her into a corner, but she isn't the type to easily escape from everything. Just what is the weakness of the star dragon type....."

The man hummed in concentration when he seemed to think of something, for he twisted his jaw and laughed unpleasantly.

"Hiding is rather troublesome..... You're going to try and do something about it instead. Your body is in my hands anyway. Even if you're prepared to sacrifice everything, I doubt you can leave this town that easily."

The man glanced at the bustling crowd around him. That's when he noticed a slouched teenager on the side, muttering something to himself.

"Though they may be lowly minions..... they should at least be able to do this for me!"

The man was enveloped in darkness, before he disappeared. No one noticed, not even the people walking directly behind him.
